

The State Of Things

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By Val Hymes



Reform: The GOP Albatross

On the surface, the Republican Convention may have looked smooth and unruffled compared with the chaotic Democratic sessions, but there were troubled waters boiling beneath.

Calls for reform, while not as urgent or loud in Miami this month as in July, will be heard almost as persistently in the GOP camp from now through 1976, the goal for reforms across the board in both parties.

The platforms may be as divergent as the campaign styles of the two candidates for president, but all three parties (remember the American Party?) are zeroing in on the grass-roots voter, the disenchanted, forgotten, silent majority.

The only way to open the doors wide enough is to encourage women, youths and minority groups along with middle America, and that's where the word "quota" became a dirty one.

Maryland — one of the Nixon campaign target states — will feel the force of these reform efforts more than most states for several reasons:

- Not only is GOP vice presidential nominee Spiro Agnew a native Marylander, but so is R. Sargent Shriver, the holder of that turbulent Democratic spot. Theirs may not be the battle of the giants or of the century, but it does draw attention to the second seat, and to Maryland.

- And if Shriver does well for McGovern in Maryland, but loses the nation, he may well cast an interested eye at the governor's mansion again, a prospect that must raise mixed emotions in the present tenant.

- Not only that, but Vice President Agnew was once Maryland's liberal governor, the man who won Democratic hearts in the Mahoney - Agnew race. As their heir apparent to the presidency in 1976, any threat to that design through the so-called reform movement will divide Free State Republicans faster than you can say "Theodore R. McKeldin." So any whisper of a "dump Agnew" movement is a big no-no in Maryland.

- Yet one of the leaders of party reform is Maryland GOP Sen. Charles McC. Mathias, who went to Miami determined to make the Republican Party

comfortable for the moderate as well as the conservative, the young as well as the middle-aged, the black as well as the white. Most of Maryland's GOP leaders agree with him in principle, but are equally determined to avoid a "McGovernizing" of the party.

- Even the system of rewarding states for electing Republicans with more convention seats affected Maryland partly because she is so close to the Nation's capital where the action is, and where the Court is that has mandated fair representation. Some of that action includes cabinet member Rogers C. B. Morton, Interior secretary, who with Congressman William O. Mills will lead many discouraged Wallace and Humphrey-ites into the Nixon fold.

- And imagine the attention Maryland gets, if President Nixon once again loses Maryland with Baltimore County's Spiro Agnew at his side. GOP City Chairman Archie Jones says Nixon must carry Baltimore's black Seventh District in order to have a crack at the State, so where does that put the "reform" movement?

- Last but not least is the split between the rebels and regulars in the Maryland delegation itself. More than four years in the making, since the Rockefeller nomination, that rift promises to have bitter after-effects that will result in a major state party shake-up unless some masterful diplomacy is applied soon.

The Republican delegation from Maryland went to Miami with mixed emotions and with

the threat of a floor walk-out hanging over its head. At this writing, the known rebel troops included from Western Maryland, Robert A. McKee of Hagerstown and J. Wallace Close of Cumberland.

The Regulars are partly led from Frederick County by Maryland Sen. Edward P. Thomas Jr., chairman of State Committee to Re-Elect the President.

Some Republicans may have crowded over the Democrats' confusing credentials fights based on party reform efforts. When 1976 comes around, they may wish they had fought it out in 1972.

For while they may be cocksure of a victory in November, it's those persistent harbingers of reform from within that are gnawing steadily at that confidence.

THE JAMES AFFAIR had a familiar ring to it. Senate President William S. James was offered a Court of Appeals judgeship when the timing was all wrong for him but just right for Gov. Marvin Mandel. The same thing happened to House Ways and Means Chairman John Hanson Briscoe (D. St. Mary's) who was in line for a Southern Maryland Circuit judgeship in competition with Mandel friend Joseph D. Weiner.

Mandel waited until just before the 1972 session when Briscoe's acceptance would have put him and legislative leaders in an uncomfortable shuffle, before offering the post. Briscoe turned it down. Weiner won it, then was defeated at the polls.

In the James case, Mandel wishes to avoid choosing between him and Chief Judge Robert C. Murphy, then in the Special Appeals Court, for the chief judgeship of the State's highest court.

So he waited until the Senate power struggle became a serious concern to James, State party

chairman, then offered him just a judgeship, not the choice seat.

Senator James did not turn down the appointment because he coveted the top seat. He clearly said a year ago that the chief judgeship to the top court is the only appointment he could not turn down when the Senate he loved needed him.

An open airing of the power struggle in the Senate has been averted for now, but the bitterness may backfire on The Man with the good timing.

THE OFFER TO ARTHUR BREMER by the Public Defender system to represent him in his appeal resurfaces the conflict between the new State program and the Federal government over custody of the celebrated defendant. Bremer has been declared an indigent in Federal court, which appointed Benjamin Lipsitz, but if he signs such a statement in the Maryland court, he must give up Lipsitz there. Bremer's father has started a fund for the appeal, which must be filed by Sept. 5. Judge Ralph W. Powers will schedule a hearing for the motion for a new trial sometime after his return this week. Federal authorities hesitate to abandon their trial in case there is a reversal on appeal of the State case, freeing Bremer, yet dislike playing an encore.

THE ADMISSION THAT a management consultant lied about his credentials before the Public Service Commission in the Baltimore Gas and Electric rate case was a serious blow to the first effort by People's Counsel Martin H. Freeman to create a precedent of questioning management efficiency in utilities.

It was also a blow to the Board of Public Works, which had approved the \$20,000 study grant in a pioneering consumer protection move. Freeman promised to apply to other utilities demanding rate increases.